4.0 Summary and Conclusions

4.1 Needs Identification

The following are the principal problems associated with tour bus operations in the District of Columbia, as identified in earlier sections of this report:

- traffic congestion caused by tour bus "cruising," as a result of inadequate tour bus parking space
- traffic congestion caused by a lack of space for loading/unloading tour buses at major points of interest
- intrusion of tour buses into local neighborhoods, by buses seeking parking spaces and waiting to pick up tour groups
- air pollution caused by diesel fumes, exacerbated by excessive mileage and traffic congestion related to the lack of parking and loading/unloading space, as well as idling in residential neighborhoods
- noise, vibration and air pollution in District neighborhoods
- obstruction of view corridors at major landmarks, especially when a "wall of buses" blocks sight lines.
- impacts to neighborhood infrastructure/pavement conditions

Major potential actions that can be implemented to address these problems consist of expanding the supply of tour bus parking and boarding spaces, designating tour bus routes, and developing alternative means of distributing tour bus passengers. More specifically, three categories of parking have been identified that may play a role in tour bus management:

- parking outside the downtown area, i.e. *peripheral parking*
- structured parking facilities within the downtown area
- on-street or off-street surface parking located close to major points of interest.

The first two of the above types of parking may serve relatively long-term layovers, i.e. one hour or longer. Conveniently located on-street or surface parking would serve shorter-term needs, ranging from brief "photo stops" to visits to outdoor monuments or memorials lasting up to roughly an hour.

If sufficient parking spaces are made available to accommodate tour buses, cruising and resultant adverse impacts—including air pollution and intrusion into residential neighborhoods--will decrease. It also will become more practical to channel tour buses onto designated routes leading to and from parking areas and points of interest. There also are a number of supporting measures that can increase the likelihood that tour bus parking facilities will be fully and efficiently used:

- parking facility pricing strategies—coordinated pricing of tour bus parking facilities to ensure a high turnover of premium spaces intended for short-term use

- advanced scheduling—to provide for a more stable flow of visitation and tour bus traffic at major destinations
- information systems—to let tour bus drivers know where parking spaces are available and also to facilitate billing, licensing, and other administrative functions
- permitting/licensing and enforcement—essential to ensure compliance with tour bus management measures, including use of designated parking spaces and routes;
- security measures
- driver facilities—services and amenities required for tour bus drivers during layovers.

4.2 Primary Requirement: Tour Bus Parking

Responding to the need for relatively long-term parking is relatively straightforward. The study has identified over 20 potential sites for *surface parking lots* at the periphery of the District or *structured parking* in the downtown area. The availability of parcels for tour bus parking downtown is limited, as a result of high real estate costs. The logical solution is to seek locations for developing parking outside the downtown area with good access to the Monumental Core and other points of interest visited by tourists. Another criterion for site selection is lack of adverse impacts on neighborhoods or environmental resources. Generally, these sites could be developed as surface parking lots.

Most of the prime candidate sites for peripheral parking are in the eastern section of the District, however, and would not provide as convenient access for sites in the western section of the District as for central destinations. As discussed in Chapter 3, access times ideally should be under 10 minutes. Thus, the study did consider a number of options for providing tour bus parking in structured facilities located downtown.

The provision of structured parking for tour buses, however, presents several issues:

- the financial viability of constructing parking facilities in the downtown area for tour bus use;
- adverse traffic impacts at entrances and exits of garages;
- practicality of tour bus usage of garages, in light of low usage of tour bus parking spaces at Union Station.

Preliminary analysis performed for this study suggests that the construction of parking spaces in above-ground structures may be financially feasible, depending on land costs. Follow-on studies are necessary to determine the traffic impacts of parking facilities that may be constructed at any of the individual potential sites identified in this report. The existing low level of demand for tour bus parking at Union Station appears to reflect pricing policy, under which buses are charged $20 for three hours. In other U.S. cities, tour bus parking rates are in the range of $20 per day, allowing for buses to enter and leave the garage several times.

4.3 Distribution Strategies

Responding to the need for long-term parking is relatively straightforward, compared to meeting short-term tour bus parking needs. For short-term parking, further actions would be required to meet boarding space requirements and to alleviate the congestion associated with concentrated tour bus activity in the Monumental Core and other areas where major attractions are located. Beyond the need for tour bus parking, these problems relate to the *distribution* of tour bus passengers in core activity areas. Two alternative strategies may be pursued:

- Distribution by tour bus, requiring the provision of short-term parking and boarding space
- Distribution by alternative mode(s).

4.3.1 Strategy 1 - Distribution by Tour Bus

Tour buses, as currently operated, provide essentially door-to-door service for tour bus groups, which remain intact while visiting points of interest. Thus, tour buses serve as the *mode of distribution* for tour bus groups throughout the District. It is possible to develop a tour bus management plan that continues the current mode of operation for tour buses, including their role in distributing passengers among tour group destinations.

The success of this strategy depends on meeting several needs that could not be addressed effectively by either peripheral lots or downtown garages:

- short-term stops (less than 1 hour), which could be best served by on-street parking or off-street surface parking downtown
- expansion of boarding space at major tour bus destinations.

Thus, surface parking, whether in on-street spaces or off-street lots, would be needed if the short-term “photo stop” is to be preserved. There are, in fact, a large number of existing on-street spaces that could be reserved for tour bus usage and they may need to be made available only during the peak spring and fall seasons. The study has identified an area with approximately 40 on-street spaces near Union Station that could be reserved in peak seasons for tour bus use. The trade-off inherent in this solution is that the availability of convenient parking to the general public would be reduced. Possible mitigation for the lack of public parking spaces would be to expand the supply by constructing new parking facilities and to encourage users of displaced parking spaces to use public transit, at least during peak tourist season.

Providing adequate space for loading/unloading tour buses also is critical to reducing adverse traffic impacts. Preliminary analysis, based on an estimate of 1,000 tour buses per day operating in the District in peak season, indicates that boarding space for 10 buses is needed at major points of interest, such as the Capitol, White House, and Lincoln Memorial. This report includes a concept for providing 25 bus boarding spaces on the

streets bordering the National Mall as part of the solution to the current shortage of loading/unloading space in the Monumental Core.

4.3.2 Strategy 2- Distribution by Alternative Mode

In several of the U.S. cities reviewed for the best practices section of this study and virtually all European cities, tour buses do not serve as the primary distribution mode among destinations located in the historic city center or core area for tourism. Tour buses transport groups to one of several staging locations, from which the groups circulate to points of interest, either on foot or, frequently in Europe, by public transportation. In the past, it has been proposed that Metro be used to complement tour bus operations, serving to distribute tour bus groups within the Monumental Core. More recently, a *Downtown Circulator* service has been proposed that would complement existing public transit services. The *Downtown Circulator* could substitute for or reduce the role of tour buses as the mode of distribution for tour groups in the downtown area. *Downtown Circulator* operations also would be compatible with increased reliance on walking as a mode of transportation among sites located close to one another.

Implementation of the *Downtown Circulator* for tour group distribution Could reduce the need for circulation of Tour Buses within downtown Washington.

Disadvantages associated with a strategy based on distribution by *Downtown Circulator* are:

- The need for loading/unloading space would persist. The timing of *Downtown Circulator* departures could be managed to produce more even arrivals at individual attractions, thus resulting in some reduction in the queuing of traffic. The *Downtown* Circulator, therefore, would not substantially reduce the need for boarding space, unless the volume of visitation is constrained or reliance on walking is increased for distributing tour groups among sites that are clustered close together.
- Tour bus operations would need to change in ways that may be perceived as detrimental to some types of tour groups and the tour bus industry. The convenience and perceived security of door-to-door service currently offered by tour buses is valued by many school groups and senior citizens, in particular. Maintaining a group intact is more difficult—and in many cases may be impossible—if the group is required to board transit vehicles shared with the

public. Because tour buses would play a reduced role in serving the tour group, providing regional or "line haul" transportation to the District, but only limited service as a mode of distribution within the city, the share of revenues received by tour buses might decline if operators did not adjust their business plans to accommodate the circulator service.

- Passenger boarding areas, including substantial waiting and queuing space for pedestrians as well as loading/unloading space for buses, would need to be created for the transfer of tour groups to the *Downtown Circulator*.

Regarding the need for boarding areas, a logical solution would be to create one or more intermodal transfer facilities close to the Monumental Core. This concept is a variation on the provision of structured tour bus parking facilities in the downtown area. Parking for tour buses would be needed at the intermodal center(s), which would serve as terminals or stations for the *Downtown Circulator*. Promising sites for the creation of an intermodal center include Union Station, Banneker Overlook, and a site in the western section of the District (several options are identified in Chapter 3) well-situated to serve Georgetown.

It also is relevant to consider that there are several "hop on/hop off" privately-operated sight-seeing bus and trolley services in the District, including the *Tourmobile* operated under contract to the National Park Service. These services add to the demand for boarding space and contribute to traffic. Tour Bus passenger distribution needs should be assessed in relation to these existing services and necessary coordination needs to be provided for the management of boarding space.

4.4 Next Steps: Development of a Tour Bus Management Plan

The current study has served to identify the components of tour bus management plan. Most critically, the plan must address the need for parking and boarding space. The total number of spaces needed to meet total peak season demand is likely to exceed 600 spaces; bus counts currently scheduled for the fall of 2003 should provide a basis for refining this estimate. A logical approach to addressing this need would consist of the following actions:

- Develop a small number of central/peripheral parking lots to accommodate several hundred buses—prime potential locations include New Jersey and I Streets, So.Capitol Street Bridge/Anacostia, Buzzard's Point, and East Potomac Park/Hains Point for the Monumental Core area and Carter Baron Amphitheatre and Western Division Metrobus Garage for the National Cathedral;
- Reinforce Union Station as a tour bus parking location. Two primary actions are needed: (1) modify pricing policy to allow multiple ins and outs for each tour bus, at a daily fee of approximately $20; (2) re-stripe and reserve more spaces for tour buses, particularly as the planned capacity expansion of the garage is implemented; develop temporary surface parking lot at former Convention Center site;
- Consider reserving on-street spaces for tour buses in peak season; on-street tour bus parking could first be implemented in the area around Union Station on a trial basis;

- Consider implementation of concept for adding tour bus loading/unloading space on National Mall (presented in Chapter 3);
- Work with relevant stakeholders to evaluate the feasibility of expanding loading/unloading space at and near major points of interest, such as the Capitol, White House, Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials; implement and enforce policies to increase turnover of space by limiting standing time in curbside spaces to 10 minutes, to accommodate loading/unloading only—parking for any longer duration must be off-site in designated parking areas.

The above actions represent relatively low cost, non-capital intensive measures--the "low lying fruit"—and should produce significant benefits in terms of alleviating some of the problems related to tour bus operations. In addition, the approach of implementing tour bus management on an incremental basis will provide the opportunity to test and fine-tune different elements of the tour bus management program. This experience will provide the basis for determining whether larger-scale projects, investments, and perhaps changes in existing tour bus operations—such as the construction of new structured parking facilities or intermodal terminals downtown or the implementation of a *Downtown Circulator*—are warranted.

In addition to the approach outlined above, supporting measures such as advanced scheduling, information systems, permitting, and enforcement need to be pursued. The short-term actions implemented should be followed by cooperative work with stakeholders to address the following program elements:

- Parking facility pricing strategies: estimation of capital and operating costs and revenues as basis for establishing a coordinated multi-facility rate structure;
- Advanced scheduling: determine the level of interest among organizations responsible for candidate sites in being included in a coordinated advanced visitor reservation/scheduling system;
- Information systems: specify system requirements (e.g. number of parking facilities, role of system in billing, licensing), track advances in systems technology, determine effectiveness for communicating information on parking facility occupancy and program administration
- Permitting, licensing and enforcement: pending the outcome of litigation concerning tour bus permitting fees, fee structure revisions should be considered in conjunction with the development of a financial plan to support parking programs and increased enforcement of tour bus regulations; legal restrictions on tour bus routing should be considered as parking facility plans are advanced .

This study has identified the constituent elements of a tour bus management plan for Washington, DC. Options have been presented, advantages and disadvantages of each option have been identified, and a course of action has been recommended for further development of and selection among options. These study products are intended to provide a foundation for policy choices by officials and citizens that will support better tour bus service and improved traffic, environmental conditions, and quality of life in the nation's capital.